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Charter Review Commission  
County of Kaua'i  
4444 Rice Street  
Lihue, Hawai'i 96766

Dear Commission Members,

I attended your January meeting because I am very concerned about the condition of the neighborhood parks on the West Side, particularly those in Hanapepe Heights. I stayed to listen to some of the discussion of the alternative ways of structuring the County Council, because our community challenges extend way beyond our parks.

I appreciate your frustration with the "at large" versus "by district" council election alternatives: Neglect of the outlying communities (it is very real) versus pork barrel allocations. I would like to suggest a third alternative. I think the County needs formalized, County-supported Community Councils. We need to recognize that Kaua'i's population is dispersed and relatively low density. It's obviously difficult for at-large elected officials and the centralized professional staff to follow the concerns and issues in small communities that are a half hour or 45 minutes away. Out of sight, out of mind prevails. We have County parks in our neighborhood that aren't shown on the zoning maps and are not in the county's ADA compliance inventory.

The Mayor's Ka Leo O Kaua'i program has been surprisingly successful, from our perspective. We've been able to find grant funding to fix up our neglected parks, major road hazards have been corrected, and Hanapepe Town has made progress on several projects. The historic walk in place, there's a new Town sign, and there are plans and grant funding in place for a major beautification effort. This structure needs to be enhanced and formally incorporated into the County government. With more stature and responsibility, these groups would provide the existing County government with additional input on local needs, concerns, and priorities.

I understand that in the past, the plantations provided many community services. They're gone. The County has growing responsibilities in diverse locations. I see no value in paying more money for more time for the County Council to continue neglecting these communities. There are no structural incentives for them to make more of an effort. The communities should be given more autonomy and more responsibility. If one travels through rural areas on the mainland, there are a lot of communities with less population than the Ele'ele, Hanapepe, Waimea, or Kekaha and yet, they have their own mayor and city council.

I would expect these community councils to be volunteers, supported by County staff. They could be elected or appointed. Then, I think it would be productive for the County Council members to attend the meetings on some kind of a regular rotation. Reports from the communities should be a regular Council agenda item. So how could the County Council have enough time for these added responsibilities? Delegation. Community councils could prioritize and provide input on community needs much more effectively than the current system.

*In addition, one or more of the Council's standing committees should be replaced by new commissions with volunteer members. There would be more eyes and ears in the community, more community involvement, more community responsibility. Thus, the second specific charter modification I would recommend would be to replace the County Council's Parks and Recreation Committee with an independent Parks and Recreation Commission. Independent of the Council, the members of this commission would be better able to advocate for our parks. They should be appointed by districts so they can monitor the use and condition of parks that are rarely visited by County officials under the current structure. They would be more accessible as members of their local communities. Again, they should be volunteers with professional staff support services and regular contact with the County Council.*

Kaua'i has many generous, knowledgeable, responsible, concerned residents such as the members of your Commission, who donate hundreds of hours for the improvement of our communities. Unfortunately, they are often frustrated by the barriers presented by the current structure and procedures of the County government. The County Charter should be modified to accommodate, incorporate, and make better use of these citizen resources.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen West-Hurd". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathleen West-Hurd, Ph.D